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WINDOWS AND THEIR SURROUNDINGS.

BY GILBERT R. REDGRAVE.

THE way to deal with the window opening, considering it as an interior feature of the house, is, we are bound to confess, a matter of some difficulty. We are not going to grumble at the architect for giving us too little light in the room, or too much window space, or for putting his windows so as to suit his external façade, with little or no regard for the comfort of the inmates. These are all points on which much may be said, but they do not concern us now. We wish to think of the window as conveniently placed and of a suitable size, with sufficient wall space above it and around it; moreover, as having room for the curtain pole and the hangings (please let the architect note this little detail), and having a pleasant landscape, or something worth looking at beyond it. We admit that here we are assuming a great deal, and that in a very large number of cases a charming view from the windows, even from the chief windows of the house, cannot be taken for granted in this off-hand way. In such instances, where the window is simply wanted for daylight, there are scores of ways in which it may be treated effectively, and may even be converted into a very pleasant feature, and this induces us to introduce a few suggestions on the treatment of the windows as a screen or transparency—a means of obtaining all the light we may happen to need, without being compelled to gaze forever on an unlovely store, or a hideous structure, across the road. There are few better methods of utilizing the lower portion of the window, where we have no wish to see what is going on in the outer world than to convert it into a Wardian case for the growth of ferns or flowers. The form we prefer for such a treatment is that the line of the glass should be kept flush with the frame on the inside, both in the upper and lower sashes, and the fern case will then project outward, a little beyond the face of the outer wall. Such a fernery should have a bent glass top, and the exterior sheet of glass, next the road, may be frosted, though for the growth of plants clear glass is preferable. The upper sash may either be glazed with roughened cathedral glass, leaded in some simple geometrical pattern, or it may consist of plate glass, if more light is required. A Wardian case, if we wish to keep it nice, is rather an expensive matter in the item of renewals, and failing this, an aquarium may be fitted up in the lower sash, or by placing dried ferns and bright colored leaves between the thickness of glass, an excellent substitute for the natural foliage may be obtained. Another plan is to introduce a simple diaper treatment in obscured glass, of different tints, set in lead, or a design in colored glass in the lower sash, leaving the upper part of the window plain. Even where the window is already filled in with ordinary plate-glass, there are many very agreeable methods of retaining the light, while shutting out a disagreeable view. The employment of thick lace curtains, or muslin in several thicknesses, hand-embroidered with sprays of natural foliage, is one plan, and we have seen the beautiful thin embroidered textiles of Japan and India employed as curtains with excellent effect. Hangings or curtains of this kind are apt to get dirty very rapidly, especially in towns, and therefore the more purely structural arrangements we first described are the best. This is rather a long digression, and some of our readers may blame us for saying so much upon this part of the subject, because they would tell us "a window, if made at all, must be intended to be looked through;" but this is not the whole truth, and we have dwelt on the other use of the window—as a means, namely, of obtaining a supply of daylight, which is quite distinct from its usefulness for seeing what is being done by other people.

We must now pass on to the branch of the subject we really meant to deal with, and assume that our room contains such a window or windows as we described on starting. On the principle of perfect adaptation for intended use, the lower sash of such a window must be glazed with clear plate-glass. To fill our window with small panes of rough glass, or to make it hideous with green glass bottle-bottoms, merely for the sake of the beauty of their tint, or the merit of the artfully gilt lead work in which they are set, is a mistake, and should not be tolerated for a moment. To have to open the window to see what is worth seeing is a fatal blunder. Nor can we agree with those who, for the sake of quaintness, would have us mince up the glass into multitudes of small panes, or who would give us the heavy sash-bars and uneven glass of Queen Anne's days. If, in order "to carry out the style consistently," it is

necessary to sacrifice the excellence of our modern plate-glass, and revert to the faulty material of bygone days, we must crave for some style less exacting and fight shy of "good Queen Anne" and her times. If it is impossible to do without tinted quarries and artistic lead work, and all the intricacies of a Japanese arrangement of sash-bars, let their knick-knacks be relegated to the upper sashes, and preserve a proper expanse of good plate-glass below. It is quite possible, also, to make a window anything but comfortable with the mode in which the blinds, the sunshades or the curtains are managed, and in arranging these matters let the use of the window be strictly borne in mind. There is a tendency at the present time in London to employ blinds of the most gorgeous description, so magnificent that it is quite a sin to pull them up, and the delighted owner is constrained, at the best of times, to let them half-way down in order that his neighbors may admire them. Other blinds are coming into fashion made of silk, or some silken fabric, gathered up into countless little puffings, all of them so many traps for dust, and, considering the purpose of the blind, quite uncalled for. A blind should be a plain, flat surface, capable of being coiled away on a roller out of sight when not in use. If we want something very decorative to replace the blind, provision should be made for a suitable hanging or canopy—a blind made to do a double duty in this way is, we are convinced, out of place.

We have next to consider the curtains or hangings, and it is here that more blunders are made than in any other detail connected with the window. The practice of darkening the room, half concealing the window, and making its shape an eyesore by means of badly arranged, clumsy drapery, has been so long fashionable that it seems almost hopeless to attempt to convert people into doing anything better. It is a sort of tradition among furnishers that there should be first a heavy cornice pole, or brass canopy, requiring a costly wooden frame to uphold it, that from this should depend a valance or shaped canopy of the same stuff as the curtain, tortured into some stiff and unnatural outline, and that this should be flanked on either side by the curtains themselves, frequently imposingly massive in their folds and looped up into bunches on either side, with appropriate fringes and tassels. We all know the conventional sweeps which the curtains must take. Now, curtains, if we regard them as draperies intended to draw across the window at night to conceal the shutters, need not be of very thick and heavy stuff. For this purpose, indeed, the lighter they are the better. Curtains are seldom used nowadays to keep out the light in the daytime, and probably a very large majority of curtains are never drawn at all. There is, in such cases, clearly no reason for making them so bulky as to take up half the available area of the window, and if for use only at night a light-colored fabric is better than a dark one. We are not admirers of curtains, we must confess, and we prefer to see pretty gauze-like hangings for the summer, and thicker materials *only* for winter use. As we hope to say more on the subject of curtains on another occasion, we will pass on to the window recess, considered as a whole.

A window may be so cosily and prettily treated, with low seats, a wide window-board or ledge, for flowers and books, the whole being contained in an appropriate niche or recess, that it is painful to reflect on the vast number of opportunities for comfort and convenience which are lost in the too common method of dealing with the window opening merely as a hole in a brick or stone wall. The modern classic revival had the effect of banishing many of the comfortable internal features of a former age, and though our Gothic architects have gone out of their way, almost, to introduce all manner of nooks and corners into their buildings, they have not, we think, done as much for the window as might be done, and as is frequently accomplished for the fire-place.

It only remains for us to plead for uninterrupted access to the windows. We naturally are averse to placing tables or articles of furniture in front of them, and we must also deprecate the selection of this place for statuary. We so often find a marble group before the window—and this, remember, is about the worst place in the room for seeing it—that we feel compelled to speak strongly on this point. Sculpture, to be seen properly, requires to have the light in front of it, and to stand against a solid background—in nine cases out of ten it is ruin to a fine statue to place it against a window.

We have thus endeavored to treat of the window under its two chief aspects, and to indicate how to deal with it appropriately in each of these cases. The only law of design which really requires attention in this respect is that of perfect adaptation to intended use.

SPANISH RENAISSANCE.

THIRD STUDY—THE BEDROOM.

(See opposite page.)

THE beauty of the ornamentation in the age of the Spanish Renaissance has been the subject of much praise and the model for many succeeding styles; and in some of the minor details—those which are apparently introduced for an effect simply—one finds the influence of national custom and the artistic manner of conforming with national beliefs. Take, in this connection, the alcove for the bed in the accompanying plate, and trace the origin of the fashion to the religion of the people. The gathering of the *padres* about the death-bed of a believer was, and to a considerable extent is, the practice in Spain. The curtains about the alcove fell together to soften the voices of the praying fathers in the outer room; while the words of the confessor, sitting at the bedside of the dying, were inaudible beyond the recessed chamber.

Converting this wise provision for the partial seclusion of the sick into a fashion, has done much toward adding to the picturesqueness of a Spanish bedroom.

A writer describing the Alcazar says: "It is an exquisite succession of delicate columns, with beautifully carved capitals, walls and balconies, which look as if worked in Mechlin lace; charmingly cool 'patois' (inner court), with marble floors and fountains; doors whose geometrical patterns defy the patience of the painter; horse-shoe arches, with edges fringed with guipure; fretted ceilings, the arabesques of which are painted in the most harmonious colors and tipped with gold; lattices, every one of which seems to tell of a romance of beauty and of love. Such are these Moresque creations, unrivaled in modern art, and before which our most beautiful nineteenth century palaces sink into coarse and commonplace buildings."

The influence of this brilliant taste extended into domestic decoration, and produced the same comparative results in the home that it did in the cathedral and public buildings. The beautiful words of Washington Irving (the most delightful of American writers) creates anew the lost splendors of the Alhambra; and the author of "Les Lettres d'Espagne" says truly, "The walls are delicate and complicated lace; the boldest stalactites cannot give an idea of the cupolas. * * * The sculptures are of ravishing delicacy, in perfect taste, of a richness that makes you dream of all that the fairy stories describe in the happy age when imagination had golden wings. * * * In fact, dear friend, this is not a palace; it is an enchanter's city."

In our accompanying illustration of a Spanish bedroom, the ornamentation is distinctively national in all respects. The alcove containing the bed is raised a few steps from the floor of the room; the pillars are of wood, richly painted, supporting a canopy that has ornaments of plaster about its edges, and beneath it Renaissance figures, resting upon shields, to bear the coat of arms or cartouche of the master and mistress of the house. The pillars at the doors and windows are of plaster, with molded decorations, and the mantel is of wood or marble; the ceiling has plaster ornaments, with panels painted in oil; the wall papered, and dado of leather or stuffed material. Between the windows at the rear of the room is a very large armoire, containing closet and chest of drawers, and the glass door of which is a prominent feature in the apartment. The windows open upon a piazza, where there is usually a broad stairway going down into the garden at the back of the house.

CHIMNEYS.

THE best chimneys are made by inclosing hard baked glazed pipe in a thin wall of bricks. Such chimneys will not only draw better than those made in the usual way, but there will be less danger from "defective flues." A four-inch wall of bricks between us and destruction by fire is a frail barrier, especially if the work is carelessly done or the mortar has crumbled from the joints. To build the chimneys with double or eight-inch walls makes them very large, more expensive, and still not as good as when they contain the smooth round flues. To leave an air chamber between them for ventilating is better than to open directly into the smoke flue, because it will not impair the draught for the fire, and there will be no danger of a sooty odor in the room when the circulation happens to be downward, as it will be occasionally. The outside chimney, if there is one, should have an extra air chamber between the very outer wall and the back of the fire-place to save heat—a precaution that removes to a great extent the common objection to such chimneys.—*Illustrated Carpenter and Builder, London.*